# Introduction. Defining the Renaissance in Music

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# DEFINING THE RENAISSANCE IN MUSIC

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## I – Musicology and Renaissance: the history of a debate

THE CONCEPT OF THE RENAISSANCE as a period in the history of music does not appear, in a strict sense, until relatively late in writings on music by comparison with those on general history or art history. In 1868 A.W. Ambros gave the third volume of his encyclopaedic history of music the title *Geschichte der Musik im Zeitalter der Renaissance bis zu Palestrina* (Leipzig, 1862–1878)[1]. Even if the awareness of a renaissance had emerged as early as the end of the fifteenth century and the first musicologists had not neglected to treat the music of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries sometimes in great depth, it was only with Ambros that a name was finally given to a period that by and large covers two centuries of music history in the West. However, the Renaissance is not synonymous with the idea of a "renaissance", and it is this difficulty of admitting the non-coincidence of the two concepts – the one historical, the other cultural – that were to lead to more than a hundred years of interminable debates and passionate enquiries, as well as some idle disputes. It is the vicissitudes of this history that will be retraced here.

### 1. The origins of a debate

When Ambros first saw the publication of his *Geschichte der Musik im Zeitalter der Renaissance bis zu Palestrina*, he already had a considerable number of musicological studies at his disposal. These aimed at biography, ranging from Baini's life of Palestrina to Carl Georg von Winterfeld's life of Gabrieli[2] (not to forget the indispensable *Biographie universelle des musiciens et bibliographie générale de la musique* (Paris, 1835–1844) by François-Joseph Fétis), to discussion of style, as when the scholars of Europe were asked to define the role of Netherlands musicians in the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries[3]. Certainly, organizers of concerts, publishers of early music and passionate collectors had paid attention to details of palaeography (Raphael Kiesewetter on the *chiavette*) or manuscript compilation (Stephen Morelot on the Dijon *chansonnier*[4]). Even if the general tendency was towards re-establishing Christian traditions (whether or not Catholic), historical

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1 It is worth pointing out that in subsequent editions the title underwent a significant abbreviation to *Geschichte der Musik*.

2 Giuseppe Baini, *Memorie storico-critiche della vita e delle opere di Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina*, Roma, 1828 ; Carl Georg von Winterfeld, *Johannes Gabrieli und sein Zeitalter*. Berlin, 1834.

3 On the competitions organized in 1826 and in 1828 by the Académie Royale des Pays-Bas, see Robert Wangermée, *François-Joseph Fétis. Musicologue et compositeur*, Brussels, Palais des Académies, 1951.

4 Stephen Morelot, Notice sur un *manuscrit* de la bibliothèque de *Dijon*, Paris, Didron, 1856.

knowledge slowly established itself, the mass of documents accumulated and interpretations flourished[5]. Ambros could therefore examine the question critically and moreover justify his title, thus offering the earliest definition of the Renaissance in music[6].

However, contrary to what one would expect from a writer who could have read Jacob Burckhardt's *Die Cultur der Renaissance in Italien* (Basel, 1860), for Ambros the true character of the Renaissance did not begin during the fifteenth century: it begins around 1600 with the appearance of monody.

"It was not until around 1600 that monody emerged as the artistic means by which the musically gifted individual came into his own, in open opposition to the artistic style that had prevailed up to then. For monody represents the delayed birth of the spirit of the new time, the time of the Renaissance, the most essential characteristic of which was that it loosed him from those mediaeval shackles and emancipated him as an individual. After all, Italy was the true land of the Renaissance, and so it was here that the individual as such first came into his own."[7]

This choice is not as strange as it seems: monody allows Ambros to locate the Renaissance in Italy more securely than the polyphonic mass would allow him to do, for the principal representatives of the polyphonic mass in the fifteenth century came from northern Europe. Moreover, for Ambros monody was the ideal musical vehicle of subjectivity and individualism, two characteristics of the Renaissance on which Burckhardt had strongly insisted. Netherlands polyphony, by contrast, corresponds to the collective ethos inherited from the middle ages. In the second volume of his history Ambros adds a further argument in favour of his periodization: monody represents a rupture with all music composed on plainchant[8]. In other words, monody is the true manifestation in the musical sphere of the resurrection of Antiquity.

However, searching for a musical experience that could be compared to the more extraordinary achievements of the visual arts during the Renaissance, Ambros forsakes monody in order to throw the spotlight on Netherlands polyphony:

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5 For thèse developments, see *La Renaissance et sa musique au XIX^e siècle*, ed. Philippe Vendrix, Paris, Klincksieck, 2000; and Rémy Campos, *La Renaissance introuvable?*, Paris, Klincksieck, 2000.

6 On Ambros and his conception of the Renaissance, see Andrew Kirkman, "The invention of the 'cyclic' mass", *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 54 (2001), pp. 1–48. More recently by the same author: *The Cultural Life of the Early Polyphonic Mass: Medieval Context to Modern Revival*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010.

7 "Erst gegen 1600 erhob sich dort die Monodie als das künstlerische Mittel, das musikalisch kunstbegabte Individuum zur Geltung zu bringen, in offener Opposition gegen den bisherigen Kunststyl. Sie ist die allerdings verspätete Geburt des Geistes der neuen Zeit, der Zeit der Renaissance, in deren eigenstem Wesen es liegt, dass sie den Menschen aus jenen mittelalterlichen Verbindungen löste und ihn als Individuum emancipirte. Italien nun aber war das eigentliche Land der Renaissance und also das Land, wo das Individuum als solches zuerst zur Geltung kam." A.W. Ambros, *Geschichte der Musik im Zeitalter der Renaissance bis zu Palestrina*, Leipzig, 1868, vol. III, p. 11.

8 *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. xxii.

"Here music took its place on an equal footing among the ranks of the other arts and staked its claim to be appreciated as one of them".[9]

Divided between his wish to accord monody, an Italian genre, a pre-eminent role and his quest for a periodization supported by a perspective borrowed from the theory of "*Zeitgeist*", Ambros states clearly the impossibility of defining the Renaissance in the history of music:

"The fifteenth century, at once the conclusion of the middle ages and the beginning of a new period, represents in history a moment of great spiritual commotion, and it was precisely in this century that a most remarkable development in music occurs."[10]

Whatever the nuances with which Ambros qualified each of his assertions, the idea circulated widely: the Renaissance was established as a phenomenon that appeared in Italy, as monody and its consequences bear witness, and, paradoxically, also a period whose origins cannot be determined, as shown by the polyphonic products of the fifteenth century and their ambivalent nature, between plainchant and free creativity. This perception of the fifteenth century was reinforced by a lack of familiarity with the polyphonic sources of the fourteenth century. And Hugo Riemann was too late when, informed by his researches (carried out at the end of the nineteenth century, into the Squarcialupi codex, came to suggest that the Renaissance started in about 1300, he was too late)[11]. For by then any revival of the periodization debate was not deemed an indispensable task, let alone a useful one.[12]. If, for some decades, the ideas of Ambros on the Renaissance in music were not discussed, the reason can also be found in to an institutional void in musicology. While it is true that the history of music was taught in some conservatories, this teaching was almost exclusively aimed at musical executants, for whom it is hard to imagine the practical use of a course dealing with music before the time of Johann Sebastian Bach. Early music was included in composition classes at least as often as in counterpoint classes, a laudable practice that brought a pronounced modernist perspective to the art of music, even if this perspective bore the marks of academicism. In the late nineteenth century the first Chairs in the history of music were created[13].

In the late nineteenth century, the institutionalization of musicology in universities triggered a debate for which Ambros had laid the foundations in 1868 and which had until then known no sequel, at least where pre-tonal music was concerned. From the beginning the teaching of music history was organized on the model of the historical

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9 "Hier trat die Musik ebenbürtig in die Reihe der übrigen Künste ein und durfte den Anspruch stellen, eine ihnen gleiche Würdigung zu finden" . *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 13.

10 "Das fünfzehnte Jahrhundert, zugleich Abschluss des Mittelalters und Anfang der Neuzeit, bezeichnet in der Geschichte einen geistig sehr erregten Moment, und gerade in dieses Jahrhundert fällt auch eine höchst merkwürdige Entwicklung der Musik." *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 4.

11 On Hugo Riemann see the biography in *New Grove* (2001).

12 This does not mean that musicology escaped polemics altogether. Mediaeval music was the subject of bitter disputes between musicologists of horizons that varied according to geography and ideology. See John Haines, "The footnote quarrels of the modal theory: a remarkable episode in the reception of Medieval music", *Early Music History*, 20 (2001), pp. 87–120.

13 Werner Friedrich Kümmel, 'Die Anfänge der Musikgeschichte an der deutschsprachigen Universitäten. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Musikwissenschaft als Hochschuldisziplin", *Die Musikforschung*, 20 (1967), pp. 262–280.

sciences: the systematic approach became a necessity. For during the second half of the nineteenth century the shelves of libraries were continuously being enriched by studies and editions that pursued the tendencies inaugurated at the beginning of the century[14]. The systematic organization of musicological knowledge presupposed the realisation of projects in a new form. If a composer of the past seemed to stand out, it was considered appropriate to work on a complete edition of his output. This was the case with the project for an edition of the works of Roland de Lassus[15]. If certain genres of composition seemed to have played a preponderant role, it was considered important to pay attention to their history, as was the case with the mass and motet[16]. And all these projects were carried out in parallel with the preparation of new general histories of music.

## 2.The vogue

A new impetus affected musicology at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; doubtless the stimulus came from scientific factors, but also in some cases from contextual ones: a greater appreciation of the national past (particularly in Germany, but also in Italy), the raising up of new heroes (above all Lassus), the entrenchment of religious traditions. In this feverish activity the Renaissance excited less debate than the middle ages, fewer biographies of Josquin were written than of Handel or Mozart, and the manuscripts of Petrus Alamire attracted less attention than the earliest vestiges of plainchant.

In the period after 1918 the music of the Renaissance enjoyed an unprecedented vogue. No country in Western Europe escaped this movement, whose apparent sudden emergence is somewhat astonishing. Leading figures included Charles van den Borren in Belgium, André Pirro in France, Fausto Torrefranca in Italy, Heinrich Besseler in Germany. For about twenty years no musicologist, whether starting out or more experienced, could escape being excited by the music of the Renaissance. The systematic knowledge that had occupied the preceding generation was succeeded by a more specialized knowledge. Monographs, theses and articles appeared devoted to certain precise points and unknown places and composers. The

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14 On the monumental editions of the nineteenth century see Leeman Perkins, "Published editions and anthologies of the 19th century: music of the Renaissance or Renaissance music?", *La Renaissance et sa musique au XIXe siècle*, op. cit., pp.95–132. See also Dietrich Berke, "Denkmäler und Gesamtausgaben", *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 1995, vol.2, col. 1109–1156.

15 Another tendency appeared during the final third of the nineteenth century, the model of which was provided by Chrysander with his *Denkmäler der Tonkunst* (1869–1871). This model is characterized first by the way the work is organized. Each volume is confided to a particular scholarly editor; all these editors work under the direction of an editor-in-chief. It was also characterized by the concern for thoroughness within each sub-series of the collection. Eitner retained these two characteristics in his monumental *Publikationen älterer praktischer und theoretischer Musikwerke* (1873–1905). Certain sub-series of this collection are dedicated to a complete edition of printed sources from the sixteenth century. The only problem with this type of monumental edition lies in the numbering of the volumes, a real headache for librarians.

16 This typical German practice originated at the beginning of the twentieth century with the volumes of Peter Wagner (*Geschichte der Messe*, Leipzig, 1913) and Hugo Leichtentritt (*Geschichte der Motette*, Leipzig, 1908), unique syntheses unmatched until 1998 with the volume *Messe und Motette*, edited by Horst Leuchtmann and Siegfried Mauser in the series *"Handbuch der musikalischen Gattungen"*.

theses supervised by Besseler, Manfred Bukofzer, Edward Lowinsky and Leo Schrade beare witness to this, inaugurating a tradition that was to last until Wolfgang Boetticher, Carl Dahlhaus and Wolfgang Osthoff[17].

And once again this enrichment of knowledge went hand in hand with a change in the way musicological work was carried out. In fact, greater familiarity with different kinds of Renaissance music allowed some German musicologists to hold a different perspective on a type of music that, even if it had for long been an integral part of concert programmes, had only rarely been viewed from the standpoint of its musical qualities as such. Why study Renaissance music? No doubt it was a matter of taste, sometimes of obligation, but above all of a concern to demonstrate professional competence. Musicologists did not seem to think it necessary (at least in their writings) to read the music in an aesthetical or historical way, or to respond to the demands of the discipline as defined by Adler and Riemann[18]. Some musicologists working in Germany in the 1930s, who had already demonstrated their expertise, sought another way of reading this repertoire with which they had engaged so frequently in the course of producing editions or technical analyses. Moreover, these musicologists turned away from *"Naturwissenschaft"* as a model, succumbing to the charms of *"Kulturwissenschaft"* which, in accordance with new norms, was attracting historians, art historians and philosophers in Germany[19].

This change strongly characterizes the remarkable work of synthesis undertaken by Besseler in his *Die Musik des Mittelalters und der Renaissance* (1931). The intention of this famous Heidelberg professor, a close friend of Heidegger, was to trace in the music of the middle ages and the Renaissance emerging tendencies towards humanization in music, an expression that he takes up again in 1950 in *Bourdon und Fauxbourdon. Studien zum Ursprung der niederländischen Musik*: "Vermenschlichung der Musik". Strangely though, Besseler does not provide a detailed explanation of what he means by humanization[20]. He contents himself with premises that are already difficult to grasp from the standpoint of composition, such as the reintegration of music "in den Zusammenhang des Daseins und seiner tragenden Ideen" ("in the context of existence and the ideas that support it") (1931, p. 22). But Besseler is also equally preoccupied with technique, as is demonstrated by his work on bourdon and faux-bourdon (*Bourdon und Fauxbourdon*, 1950). His researches, when they go beyond philosophical discussion, touch on some important questions that are in fact associated with the beginning of the Renaissance. The subject was *à la mode*. Bukofzer in 1936 had published a much-noted thesis on English discant and faux-bourdon; the following year it was the turn of Georgiades, long-time professor at Munich, to make his point of view on the subject known. The issues at stake in the

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17 Pamela Potter, *Most German of the arts. Musicology and society from the Weimar Republic to the end of Hitler's Reich*, New Haven Yale University Press, 1998.

18 Volker Kalisch, *Entwurf einer Wissenschaft von der Musik: Guido Adler*, Baden-Baden, Koerner, 1988.

19 Rob Wegman, "*Das musikalische Hören* in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Perspectives from pre-war Germany", *The Musical Quarterly*, 82 (1998), pp. 434–454.

20 Laurenz Lütteken, "Das Musikwerk im Spannungsfeld von 'Ausdruck' und 'Erleben': Heinrich Besselers musikhistoriographischer Ansatz", *Musikwissenschaft – eine verspätete Disziplin ?*, ed. Anselm Gerhard, Stuttgart, Metzler, 2000, pp. 213–232.

"faux-bourdon" debate are important in that they concern research into the origins of the language of tonality. But in the 1930s Besseler was alone in his quest for an all-encompassing definition of the Renaissance. It was not until after the end of World War II that the debate was to be relaunched.

In the middle of the twentieth century two points of view dominated, of which by far the most distinguished spokesmen were Gustave Reese[21] and Edward Lowinsky. For Reese, the music of the Renaissance is to be read in terms of progress, of evolution in relation to the middle ages. For this author of two works still frequently quoted, there is no better witness of this progressive continuity than the music of the sixteenth century, whose rhythmic fluidity and complexity have never been surpassed. Moreover, for Reese the continuity of sixteenth-century music is manifested in a complete realisation of the potential of the triad, the control of dissonance and therefore the rationalization of the use of intervals, the extension of the tonal spectrum and the increasing homogeneity of the voices due to imitative counterpoint. He sees in the Renaissance a period privileged by musical unity: throughout Europe, in the sixteenth century, he states, only "one musical language was spoken".

Lowinsky takes a diametrically opposed view: for him the Renaissance can be characterized only by what distinguishes it from the middle ages.[22] He therefore insists vigorously on the "revolutionary" aspects of music in the fifteen and sixteenth centuries. He considers the Renaissance not only as a period of transformations leading to a complete schism with mediaeval scholasticism, but also as a period in which musicians were attempting to achieve a musical expression free from all constraint. It is evident that Lowinsky supports his thesis by a series of findings that were to be of fundamental importance for the future of musicology. For this Chicago professor some changes in the conditions of musical praxis and in the way compositions were conceived constituted sufficiently eloquent proof of the need to create an independent historical-aesthetic period. His arguments are therefore as much technical as social or aesthetic. The force of those arguments rests equally on a refusal to localize the Renaissance: several localities can be uncovered each of which brings a specific contribution that it is the historian's mission to reunite in a synthesis. Thus Lowinsky does not hesitate to pass from the north to the south of Europe and vice-versa: the phenomenon of migration, the new social conditions of musical praxis in Italy are the proof of his conclusions. But the cornerstone of Lowinsky's reasoning rests on the principle of emancipation: from the aesthetic principles that prevailed in the middle ages, and also and above all from the principles that had guided the composer (abandonment of *formes fixes*, of the modal system, etc…). For Lowinsky it is not enough to say that the Renaissance is the period of emancipation: it is also the time of setting up. Tonality, relations between music and text, modulation, chromaticism, virtuosity, instruments as a source of

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21 Gustave Reese, *Music in the Renaissance*, New York, Norton, 1954.

22 Lowinsky was a particularly prolific musicologist. His most important writings were gathered into two precious volumes: Edward Lowinsky, *Music in the Culture of the Renaissance and Other Essays*, ed. Bonnie J. Blackburn, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1989.

inspiration are equally areas in which composers of the Renaissance demonstrated their wish to discard mediaeval precepts and a desire to create new precepts.

All the arguments advanced by Lowinsky are susceptible of criticism. No matter: at the moment when Lowinsky was producing his most influential writings (between 1940 and 1960), he played a fundamental role in the teaching of musicology in the United States. There are few specialists of the Renaissance who have not followed his courses or admired his texts. During these twenty years, the subjects for doctoral dissertation reflected the comprehensive vision of the music of the Renaissance that the celebrated musicologist ardently defended. The fifteenth century was read in terms of liberation from the mediaeval yoke, while the sixteenth century was read in terms of the setting up of a new relationship between music and text and above all a new manner of composition that prefigured that of the tonal era.

At the beginning of the 1950s Leo Schrade attempted to relaunch the debate in a communication presented to the congress of the International Musicological Society at Utrecht.[23] However, Schrade took a surprising turn, for instead of broadening the concept of the Renaissance in music, he gave it a restrictive meaning. His argument rests on three points. The first borrows from the principle of "renaissance" itself, which he traces to the writings of the theorists, who were concerned to rediscover in the writings of the ancients the fundamental, authoritative principles. The second argument seems to be in opposition to the first, for Schrade sees in these same theorists a manifest wish to highlight the novelty of the praxis of their time in relation to the praxis that immediately preceded it. Thus they inaugurated – and this is his third argument – a movement that was to become more marked as the sixteenth century unfolded: the theorists who succeeded Tinctoris would also attempt to define generations of composers who, each in his own manner, contributed to the creation of innovations. Other theorists gave themselves over to purely academic research, in a quest for this ideal ancient music (Nicola Vicentino, Vincenzo Galilei).

So some important steps had been taken. Ambros adopted the concept of the Renaissance without really justifying it, thereby implying the legitimacy of the concept. Besseler attempted a preliminary explication based on a teleological principle, that is the progressive humanization of civilization. This explication presupposes a process of continuity and implicitly rejects the desire of Ambros to define the Renaissance as an autonomous period. Gustave Reese attempts to provide Besseler's perception with an analytical foundation. However, his viewpoint is no longer teleological: what matters most to him is to show the continuity that exists between the music of the middle ages and that of the Renaissance. Lowinsky restores to honour the principle of an autonomous period. In order to respond to Reese, he allows his arguments to rest on some principles found in musical writings. Schrade seeks to delve into the cultural inscription of the musical phenomenon, as if he were taking on the task of justifying the position adopted without explanation by Ambros a century earlier.

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[23] Leo Schrade, "Renaissance. The historical conception of an epoch", *Société internationale de musicologie. Cinquième congrès, Utrecht 1952*, Amsterdam, Alsbach, 1953, pp.19–32.

### 3. A praxis in crisis

During the years 1930–1950, in Germany, a preference was shown for certain areas of research, among them the music of the Renaissance.[24] However, this vogue ebbed considerably in the 1960s.[25] The most outstanding figures fled Nazi Germany and settled in the United States, bringing with them their taste for theses on the Renaissance. In the United States in the years 1950–60 demonstrating an aptitude for musicology often meant undertaking work on the music of the Renaissance or the late middle ages, rather as if this area of music history had as its only benefit the demonstration of technical skills (critical editions, translation of treatises, archival research, preparation of catalogues). And it was generally only after demonstrating this aptitude that certain recently graduated musicologists hastened to turn to more recent areas of music history, so that nowadays they have ceased to show practically any interest in the Renaissance.

In Europe, enthusiasm for the Renaissance varied according to country. It was in England that the Renaissance retained its key role in musicological training, nowadays playing the key role of a seeding ground. Numerous musicologists trained in the 1960s and 1970s devoted themselves almost exclusively to the Renaissance, not limiting themselves to English music, but tackling some very varied fields, refining some working methods that still serve as a model.[26] Paradoxically, musicologists in France remained aloof from the Renaissance vogue. Paradoxically, because those musicologists who were enthusiastic about the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, such as Nanie Bridgman or François Lesure, developed their careers outside the university milieu, where plainchant and French music of the seventeenth and eighteenth century reigned supreme.[27] At the Paris Conservatoire, the situation was the same: there were specialists in every field except the Renaissance. It was not until the creation of the musical course at the Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance that this field was finally integrated in a concrete and official way into a musicological syllabus.[28] In other words France was a late starter in the field compared with other francophone countries such as Belgium, which was closer to the Germanic tradition and where Renaissance music had always been one of the preferred fields for obvious historical reasons (the Southern Netherlands), but above

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24 The importance of the Renaissance for German musicologists can clearly be seen in the bibliography provided by Reese (*Music of the Renaissance*). By contrast, Perkins (*Music in the Age of the Renaissance*, New York, Norton, 1999) barely cites any writings in any language other than English.

25 One can gain a precise idea of German thesis subjects by consulting the site *"Doctoral Dissertation in Music"* of Indiana University at Bloomington (http://www.chmtl.indiana.edu/ddm).One can equally measure the loss of interest in the music of the Renaissance in reading the index of the periodical *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft*.

26 English music evidently plays an important role thanks to the exceptional project *Musica Britannica*. It was also in England that the periodicals specialising exclusively in early music appeared: *Early Music*, *Journal of Plainsong and Medieval Music*, *Early Music History*.

27 The situation of musicology in France and Italy has been subjected to critical scrutiny by Jürg Stenzl in "'Verspätete' Musikwissenschaft in Frankreich und Italien? Musikforschung im Spannungsfeld von Nationalismus, Reaktion und Moderne", *Musikwissenschaft – eine verspätete Disziplin ?*, pp. 281–305.

28 Thanks to the impetus provided by André Souris, Jean Jacquot and Jean-Michel Vaccaro.

all for reasons of intellectual affinity: Charles van den Borren had been studying the fifteenth century since the 1920s; he was followed by Suzanne Clercx (for a time a pupil of Besseler at Heidelberg), then Robert Wangermée, Bernard Leenaerts and, finally, Ignace Bossuyt and Henri Vanhulst. There is no music department that does not include at least one specialist in Renaissance music.[29] The situation in Italy is more delicate to explain. Certainly, musicology was slow to take hold. But even if some outstanding writers (Gaetano Cesari, Raffaele Casimiri, Fausto Torrefranca, Ferdinando Liuzzi) declared their intention of studying the music of their country dating from the glorious period of the Renaissance,[30] the first musicologist to leave an indelible mark on this area of research, Nino Pirotta, had to go abroad in order to further his brilliant career. The dynamism of a field of research is often linked to the enterprising spirit of a few figures. Among these, Armen Carapetyan deserves particular mention. This musicologist trained in the United States founded the American Institute of Musicology in 1945; the institute gave rise to editorial projects such as *Corpus Mensurabilis Musicæ* and the periodical *Musica disciplina*. For more than forty years, it was thanks to a musicologist who did not belong to any institution of teaching or research that work on the music of the Renaissance was published and disseminated under excellent conditions.

### 4. A new look

Despite the relative richness of intellectual activity, during a long time it seemed that musicologists no longer wished to re-open the "Renaissance" file. In the 1980s this area of research no longer seemed to excite American musicologists, who departed in search of new areas apparently offering a better foothold for tackling the new questions they were then formulating[31]. And when certain writers belonging to what they have agreed to call the "new musicology" incline towards the Renaissance, they accept the definition of it that Reese had proposed forty years earlier. On every occasion, whether in the case of new-wave musicologists or others, there seemed to be no obligation to cast doubt on the terms of the Renaissance, rather as if the results obtained during more than three decades of research had been unable to lead to a re-evaluation of the chronological framework in which the history of music unfolded.[32]

It was from Germany that there emerged the first discreet attempts to obtain a different reading in general terms of the commonly accepted periodization. It is true that, thanks to the stimulus provided by Reinhart Koselleck, discussions on concepts

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29 We may mention that the University of Louvain created, in collaboration with the public bodies of the Flemish community in Belgium, a foundation aimed at research into musical praxis in the Southern Netherlands, principally in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The foundation is led by Eugeen Schreurs (see the website of the la Fondation Alamire, http://www.arts.kuleuven.be/alamire/html/frameset0.html

30 The same could be said for Spain.

31 The proposal by Joseph Kerman in *Contemplating Music* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1985) with regard to Renaissance musicology (and at the same time mediaeval music) is no doubt partially responsible for this disaffection. The credulity of American researchers in this respect cannot but help raise a smile…

32 A striking example is provided by two works by Gary Tomlinson, *Monteverdi and the end of the Renaissance*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988; and *Music in Renaissance magic*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1993.

of history and the history of concepts occupy a relatively important place. From the 1960s Walter Wiora investigated the phenomenon of historicism[33]. Later, Werner Braun engaged with systems of periodization in order to reveal not only their arbitrary functions but also possible ways of exploiting them[34]. These and other reflections led to the wish to rewrite a general history of music that took account of both of customary historiography and of recent discoveries. The two volumes dedicated by Ludwig Finscher to the Renaissance in the *Neues Handbuch der Musikwissenschaft* series bear witness to a genuine wish to rethink previous work on the music of the Renaissance[35]. For the first time in a general history of music concerning the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries a musicologist directly outlines the difficulties inherent in research on the music of the Renaissance. However, his introduction unfortunately contains no trace of a conceptual shift: the rupture of 1420 is justified by the realities of musical praxis (contrapuntal writing, revision of genres)[36].

Profound questioning emerged in England at the beginning of the 1990s, in two distinct forms. In 1993 Christopher Page published his *Discarding Images. Reflections on music and culture in medieval France* (Oxford, Clarendon Press); the same year there appeared Reinhard Strohm's *The Rise of European Music, 1380–1500* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press). The first author published an ephemeral, brilliant pamphlet; the second a profound and lasting survey. But at the time it was Page who stimulated reflection on the definition of the role of music in the cultural history of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, after he had provoked some reaction, occasionally (and with justification) some angry ones. When Philipp Weller tried to redress the balance in this short quarrel, he did it at the expense of the Renaissance, once again allowing the middle ages to triumph by expanding their chronological borders[37]. And this extension would have some indirect consequences at the end of the 1990, with Busnois becoming a representative of the late middle ages! But Weller, no less than Page, did not succeed in isolating characteristics eloquent enough to permit a re-definition of the Renaissance in music. He provided no key that can explain whether it is an element of continuity or of rupture which connects or separates the *Ars nova* of Johannes de Muris from the *Nova musica* of Johannes Ciconia. He offers no further opening out towards the debates that shook intellectual circles caught between the new incompatibilities between the mathematical and musical universe, incompatibilities that appeared with the reassessments of concepts as fundamental as the *species* of consonance and dissonance. In relegating all

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33 *Die Ausbreitung des Historismus über die Musik*, ed. Walter Wiora, Regensburg, Bosse, 1969.

34 Werner Braun, *Das Problem der Epochengliederung in der Musik*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliches Buchgesellschaft, 1977.

35 Ludwig Finscher (ed.), *Die Musik des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts*, 2 vols., Laaber, Laaber-Verlag, 1989.

36 Despite this relative failure, it is worth mentioning this work which, with its desire to question the systems of periodization, clearly distinguishes itself from the histories of music that have appeared in Italy, England and the United States. There exists no history of music comparable in spirit or breadth in the French language.

37 Philip Weller, "Frames and Images: Locating Music in Cultural Histories of the Middle Ages", *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 50/1 (1997), pp. 7–54.

sociological considerations to the background, he does not provide keys to explaining the place of music in a Europe that was in the process of socio-economic and politico-religious reforms which for more than two centuries would shake human society and its activities, both spiritual and material.

By contrast, Strohm, starting right from his title, openly manifests his desire to engage the debate on a broader scale. Ascending from the particular – modifications in compositional praxis – to the general – modifications in the conditions surrounding this praxis – he constructs an immense arch covering 120 years of history in which continuities and ruptures, innovations and traditions exist side by side. In other words, he refuses to define these years in unequivocal terms. The awareness of belonging to a new age affects Ciconia as much as Tinctoris. So, in order to defuse the debate while offering some precise and pragmatic answers that were no longer ideological, what Strohm contributed above all was to insist on the slow process of change that undeniably exists between a piece composed during the last third of the fourteenth century and a piece performed for the first time in 1500, without allowing this later date to be a point of demarcation.

Mannerism is another field that attracted intense interest. Claude Palisca then Maria Rika Maniates explored the concept by applying it, for good or ill, to music[38]. Though geographically localized, musical mannerism comes to epitomize a Renaissance that loses itself in its own intricacies, beginning in the middle of the sixteenth century, even while reformers were emerging that marked the beginning of a new era, that of tonality. The image of the Renaissance in music that emerges from the concept of mannerism is blurred and indecisive. It risks once again reducing the length of the Renaissance while accentuating the phenomenon of rupture provoked by the invention of tonality; in turn this process relegates to the background the persistence into the seventeenth century of various characteristic of the sixteenth century.

Particular studies carried put by specialists since the end of the 1950s, besides having consequences on the deepening of knowledge, also carry implications for the conception of the Renaissance. As if wishing to respond to the question to which Fétis tried to respond in 1828, Robert Wangermée paints a subtle picture of music in the Netherlands, casting vivid, colourful light on the original milieu of the northern musicians who thronged the Italian courts that had embarked on the road towards triumphant humanism[39]. He is certainly not the first to draw attention to Netherlandish musicians. But in weaving the close links between the social structures that underpinned praxis and individual destinies, some celebrated, others unknown, he points up the polymorphous nature of the Renaissance in music. In this respect one could consider that Nino Pirotta was his "rival". Confronted with the

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38 Claude Palisca, "Ut oratoria musica: the rhetorical basis of musical mannerism", *The meanning of Mannerism*, ed. F.W. Robinson and S.G. Nichols, Hanover, University Press of New England, 1972; Maria Rika Maniates, *Mannerism in Italian music and culture, 1530–1630*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1979.

39 Robert Wangermée, *La musique flamande dans la société des XV^e et XVI siècle*, Brussels, Arcade, 1965.

apparent musical void in Italy in the early fifteenth century, Pirotta opens up musicology to some data that it had always ignored, especially those which pertain to orality[40]. In a manner of speaking a direct heir to Burckhard, the Italian musicologist traces continuities between Italian musicians of the *trecento* and those of the *cinquecento*. Does he mean by this that the Renaissance did not trigger a rupture? It is difficult to affirm this. Pirotta poses his hypotheses with extreme care and prudence, broadening musicology's field of enquiry rather than laying down truths.

From all these efforts, which reinforce each other, there emerges a fractured image of the Renaissance. This fine object, which, since the nineteenth century, one believed to be definable (although nobody had really succeeded in defining it), now became an impossible subject. It seemed to be everywhere at once, manifesting itself in various forms, and in genres as different as the frottola and the *cantus firmus* mass. Who, when faced with this phenomenon, would have dared to define the Renaissance in music? Rather than risking this, was it not better to direct one's research not towards new topics, but to acquiring a new perspective?

It was this task of acquiring a renewed perspective that musicologists undertook from the middle of the 1970s. Thus orality could also include *musica ficta* (Bent, Berger); places could include Ferrara (Lockwood, Newcomb) and Mantua (Fenlon) as well as Bruges (Strohm) and Lyon (Dobbins); the range of practical matters that were studied was extended to manuscript and printed copies, instrumentalists, singers, the wealthy patrons of civic humanism as well as the princes of great empires[41]. Freed from any need to define their topic – the Renaissance in music – musicologists threw themselves without inhibition into every conceivable avenue of research. They became enthusiastic about not having constructed a comprehensive objective that could have hobbled the diversity of interests for the sake of a definition about which they would not in any case have been able to agree. It was a musicological polyphony.

At the beginning of the 1980s the biographical genre received a new impetus thanks notably to the volume that David Fallows devoted to Guillaume Dufay (London, Dent, 1981). However, this impetus rarely manifested itself in the form of single-author works. The genre was still regarded with suspicion, and to write one presupposed an attempt at justification. Rather it was collected writings that were preferred, such as the Josquin volumes edited by Lowinsky (1976). The difficulties of the life-work articulation are exasperated further in dealing with a composer of the fifteenth or sixteenth century. Anecdotes are rare, and the status of composers complex to say the least[42]. Even a composer for whom information abounds, such as

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40 Nino Pirotta, *Music and culture in Italy from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1984.

41 An almost exhaustive bibliography of these research topics and of certain musicologists can be found in the new edition of the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, London, MacMillan, 2001.

42 David Fallows's recent *Josquin* (Turnhout, Brepols, 2009) confirms the exception that I have just pointed out.

Lassus, has been the object only of documentary compilations[43]. Does a madrigal tell us less than an opera? On would gain this impression given that any attempt at a psychological portrayal of a sixteenth-century composer is viewed with suspicion by musicologists. But there are other explanations apart from the weight of suspicion that sometimes encumbers the community of musicologists working on the Renaissance.

The first is of a theoretical nature. Certain fundamental elements of the musical language of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries yield their secrets only with difficulty, whether in the field of notation[44], modality[45] or the definition of genres[46]. In addition, the study of compositional process can be based on sketches or rough drafts only in exceptional cases[47]. It must also respond to the theoretical principles that were prevailing at that time and to which access remains difficult, while not neglecting the contribution of contemporary performers and the analytical methods worked out since the nineteenth century[48]. Constrained by this thicket of imperatives, writers only rarely overcome their inhibitions. Some attempts have been offered that focus on questions of form or text-music relations. However, already Besseler, along with his predecessors in the nineteenth century, had insisted on the individual dimension of creativity as a distinguishing factor in the Renaissance compared with the middle ages, a sociological perspective that Rob Wegman has recently reinvestigated[49]. But once again, it is only recently that documents concealed in archives have revealed data that can be exploited in a sociological perspective on composers active in the fifteenth century and early sixteenth centuries[50].

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43 This is no longer true since the appearance of a critical biography that Annie Coeurdevey has devoted to the composer (Paris, Fayard, 2003).

44 See principally the articles of Margaret Bent, among which "Notation", *New Grove*, 2001. See also Karol Berger, *Musica ficta: theories of accidental inflections in vocal polyphony from Marchetto da Padova to Gioseffo Zarlino*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987; Anne-Maria Busse-Berger, *Mensuration and proportions signs: origins and evolutions*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991.

45 Harold Powers, "Mode", *New Grove*, 2001. See also Bernhard Meier, *The modes of classical vocal polyphony*, New York, Broude Brothers, 1988; and Cristle Collins Judd, *Reading Renaissance Music Theory: Hearing With the Eyes*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000.

46 Paradoxically, this area is the least subject to comprehensive study.

47 Jessie Owens, *Composers at work: the craft of musical composition 1450–1600*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1996.

48 For an exposé of the difficulties, see, for the defence of a certain point of view, Margaret Bent, "The grammar of early music", *Tonal structure in early music*, ed. Cristle Collins Judd, New York, Garland, 1998.

49 Rob Wegman, "From maker to composer: improvisation and musical authorship in the Low Countries, 1450–1500", *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 49 (1996), pp. 409–479.

50 For example Agostino Magro, "Premièrement ma chapelie. Johannes Ockeghem in Tours", *Early Music History*, 18 (1999), pp. 165–258. It has been known for only a few years that Johannes Ciconia spent some months in Rome. The discovery of these composer itineraries is a first step towards a correct sociological interpretation. For the sixteenth century, the social approach to music is supported by more plentiful information and has already become the object of theorising. See Claudio Annibaldi (ed.), *La musica e il mondo: mecenatismo e committenza musicale in Italia tra Quattro e Settecento*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1993.

If defining the Renaissance is already a complex task for the music historian, defining musical humanism is no simpler. And this difficulty does not belong exclusively to musicology. Claude Palisca is one of the few musicologists to have tackled this task[51]. Conscious that humanism is manifested notably in the re-appropriation of the culture of Antiquity, he attempts to find out what among Italian theorists of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries illustrates this concern for reintegration and diffusion of a partly forgotten body of knowledge. It would be easy to reproach Palisca for his choice of centring his investigations on theorists who were exclusively Italian or on the aspect of harking back to the Ancient world. For he could not help reaching an impasse which led him to imagine a new alliance of the arts, one that implies a decentring of the parameters that he had used to define the nature of musical humanism in the fifteenth century. Even if he was carried away by the mirage, characteristic of musical historiography after 1945, that sees in the Renaissance the meeting point of a unique and marvellous union of word and sound, he opened up unexplored perspectives that permitted a promising multi-disciplinary approach. Following on from Palisca, Ann Moyer has analysed the contribution of Italian theorists to natural philosophy from the standpoint of scientific history[52]. Recently Timothy Reiss, a historian and specialist in comparative studies, has succeeded in integrating musico-theoretical thought into the spate of discoveries that animated the world of scholars of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries[53]. Resting on a pile of more precise information, musicology can at last, by associating itself with its sister disciplines, participate in the quest for an answer to a question that has been running through it like a thread ever since it acquired a name: What is the Renaissance?

## II. Current discussions

THE TEXTS GATHERED into this volume bear eloquent testimony to the richness of current discussions of the idea of the Renaissance in music. This idea takes hold of every aspect of culture and also casts a critical eye on a phenomenon that characterizes (and divides) Europe in the modern period, that of confessional choice.

It is rare to find musicologists any longer manipulating historical facts in order to integrate them into a vision of the Renaissance borrowed from a global vision of the history of western culture, a route that in some ways is contrary to that followed by the founders of musicology. Certainly, the name still exists – Re-naissance -, but its manifestations are first scrutinized in texts that provide some testimony of a crisis of conscience (**see the articles by Strohm and Owens**). In these texts, the consciousness of a historic dimension does not burst forth in the terms

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51 Claude Palisca, *Humanism in Italian Renaissance musical thought*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1985.

52 Ann Moyer, *Musica scientia. Musical scholarship in the Italian Renaissance*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1992.

53 Timothy Reiss, *Knowledge, discovery and imagination in early modern Europe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997. The researches of Palisca, Moyer, Reiss others are synthesized in Philippe Vendrix, *La musique à la Renaissance*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1999.

found in the triumphalist historiography of the 18th century. The style is hesitant, dogged, acting simultaneously as the herald of the contemporary and the protector of tradition. The report of a theorist of Germany in the early 16th century who is taking part in the diffusion of the university model[54], that of a Florentine humanist (**Zanovello**) observing transformations of the political scene, that of a French poet who flourishes at the end of a long war (the Hundred Years War) are so many manifestations of how art was understood and conceived.[55] Commonplaces abound, because, undeniably, in the Renaissance, as before and subsequently up to our own day, the repetition of commonplaces shocks no one, being part of western culture. Theorist and poet take the same path, albeit with different modes of expression (**Hutton**).

Such observations do not prevent us from underlining change and its conditions (**Niemöller**). These are immense, almost countless, providing much raw material for musicological work. It is nowadays becoming difficult to maintain generalizations characterized by a teleological point of view, the limits of which have been exposed by historical criticism in the last few years. If musicologists wish to integrate their researches into a broader vision, they have at their disposal an especially fertile terrain: that of relations between music and scientific knowledge (**Gozza**).[56] In the history of this relation, the points of change are undoubtedly more visible than elsewhere. For science poses fundamental questions about the way music works and what it means, on the notion of harmony or the nature of pleasure. Rather than focussing on questions of identity (the place of music in the new age), scientific texts explore the ethical nature of music. Neither Tinctoris, an expert and reformer in the field of several aspects of musical theory, nor Mersenne, a scholar who knew about the more recent scientific discoveries and philosophical and theological debates, supply a detailed explanation about the workings of musical pleasure. And this inability was to last beyond the publication of the *Harmonie universelle* in 1636. However, it would be reductionist to imagine that the constraints of Tinctoris, the music teacher of Beatrice of Aragon, were the same as those of Mersenne, the Minim father. Slowly in the course of the 16th century, when the Pythagorean heritage was being debated, new paradigms were put in place that permitted the establishment of ever closer relations between the object of theory and the definition of musical pleasure (which is the central question for the musician and the musicologist).[57]

The idea defended by Tinctoris, that mathematical reasoning has to be tested by sensory judgement, is not only perfectly "modern", but above all leads him to

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54 On this subject, see

55 Margaret Bent, "The musical stanzas in Martin le Franc's Le champion des dames", *Music and Medieval Manuscripts: Paleography and Performance*, ed. John Haines and Randall Rosenfeld, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2004, pp.91-127.

56 See also the recent work by Timothy Reiss, *Knowledge, discovery and imagination in early modern Europe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997. These works, along with those of Palisca and Moyer are synthesized in Philippe Vendrix, *La musique à la Renaissance*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1999.

57 See Philippe Vendrix, « La place du plaisir dans la théorie musicale en France de la Renaissance à l'aube de l'Âge baroque », *Le plaisir musical en France au XVIIe siècle*, Sprimont, Mardaga, 2006, pp. 29-47.

recognise the powerlessness of arithmetic in questions relating to musical analysis and therefore to propose its replacement by a consideration of the notational practice, a suggestion that Zarlino and Vincenzo Galilei were to confirm, each in his own way. Another consequence of this idea was that the search for places where the presence of numerical proportions could be observed was intensified. Doubtless this is the reason for which rhythm came gradually to acquire such importance; for it is rhythm that marks the submission of the movements and emotions of the body to the orderly arrangement of time. And this orderly arrangement was to have ethical importance, since it supposes the regulation (submission to rule) of these emotions. Previously, before the rhythmic dimension acquired greater value, melody and harmony had been the object of regulation. Shifting the paradigm towards the rhythmic dimension supposes that beats and bars are easier to view in mathematical terms. This shift had multiple consequences. First, to the extent that poetics (the grammatical or rhetorical model) had begun to replace music as an analytical tool in fields dominated by either the historical dimension or by an individual stylistic imprint (as happens, for example, in the case of Alberti and Vasari in the plastic arts), the accent placed on rhythm and metre proved viable. In this way, the application of poetic analysis was likewise susceptible of being the object of a similar series of mathematical reductions: poetics and mathematics were therefore not irreconcilable. The process whereby rhythm, rather than the musical "body" (melody or harmony), became the sphere in which a mathematical model was applied, seemed to give rhythm a more abstract character, less rooted in the material. In this respect Kepler and Mersenne are especially innovatory when they place less value on mathematical knowledge as rooted in matter but define it as representing a process of human perception. Thus Kepler and Mersenne open the way towards a rationalization of the world completely different to that which had prevailed up to then: mathematical reason, by way of being representation, can become the foundation of all human activity, without claiming to be the foundation of the so-called natural world. Analogical demonstrations (*musica mundane – musica humana – musica instrumentalis*) are now no more than a memory, the description of which excites no one apart from a new category of scholars, the "antiquarians" (Kircher, Doni). Doubtless it is in the sense of this rationalization that we may read Marin Mersenne's assertion that there exists a proportional relationship between the "beauty of the universe [thanks to the] beautiful ordering that it maintains between all its parts" ("beauté de l'univers [grâce au] bel ordre qu'il garde dans toutes ses parties") and the "sweetness and goodness of Music" ("la douceur & bonté de la Musique": *Harmonie universelle*). This beauty and goodness will be the proofs of a knowledge regulated by truth. And these three terms were to become the foundation of Enlightenment thought, not always granting a precise place to pleasure – on the level of theoretical discourse, needless to say – and reintegrating harmony as the body of the music, to the detriment of rhythm.[58]

All this gives rise to another consequence: the relationship, derived from the classics, between pathos and immoderation plays a fundamental role during the

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[58] Jairo Moreno, *Musical Representations, Subjects, and Objects: The Construction of Musical Thought in Zarlino, Descartes, Rameau, and Weber*, Indiana University Press, 2004.

Renaissance[59]. Does not the setting aside of the "world in itself" as not being susceptible to mathematical analysis constitute exactly the view of nature as the realm of disproportion? And this notion of immoderation or excess seems particularly effective in that it allows us to identify what eludes regulation, in other words, to distinguish between a beauty regulated by reason and proportion, and a "je-ne-sais-quoi" that stands apart from them. It is hardly surprising that it is at the precise moment that music and poetics seem to be experiencing a new alliance that the notion of "je-ne-sais-quoi" appears in poetics. This realm of immoderation of inspiration, of this breath, of this *spiritus* (which Ficino had already underlined) which fills not only the blood but also the world, and which therefore contains the threat of disorder of the passions as well as of the immoderation of nature – this domain would soon become that of the sublime.

The religious question remains a thorny one. How can we offer a definition of the Renaissance if we bypass the reform movements? This is impossible, as the reforms divide the unity of western Christianity, provoking violent and lasting conflicts and triggering reactions (the Counter-Reformation) that had a profound impact on musical activity. This field of investigation remains rich in questions, and no music historian has yet dared to undertake a global interpretation of the phenomenon as has happened for modes of composition, the workings of patronage, diffusion or the links with the world of science. There exist some rare attempts at a global interpretation (**Koenigsberger**). The apprentice musicologist must therefore turn towards specific studies that permit access to each of the distinct movements of reform or counter-reform: Zwingli (**Reimann**), Luther (**Leaver**), Calvin (**Garside**), the Anglicans (**Leaver**), the Council of Trent (**Monson, Brauner**), the Jesuits, (**Culley, Körndle**), to cite only the most important. With the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation, the frontiers of Europe open up: to follow the tribulations of the Jesuits both at the heart of Europe and beyond its confines is to renew the way we read the history of music. Other crucial questions are still dangling despite attempts, occasionally convincing, to confront them;[60] these form part of such general problem areas as the tensions between tradition and modernity, or the conflict between local usages and global imperatives.

In conclusion, there can be no doubt that the contribution of studies on the role of the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation shifts our perspective beyond the frontiers of Europe. 1992 provided an occasion to reflect on the musical dimension of the European colonization of new worlds.[61] All this work have demonstrated the breadth of the field that is opening up to the modern historian, who is obliged to read the musical Renaissance, the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation from a viewpoint far removed from that of Ambros.

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59 Studies on this subject are plentiful, ranging from Frances Yates and D.P. Walker to Gary Tomlinson (*Music in Renaissance magic. Toward a historiography of others*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1994.

60 Rob Wegman, *The crisis of music in early modern Europe, 1470-1530*, New York, Routledge, 2005.

61 See also Tomlinson, *The singing of the new world: indigenous voice in the era of European contact*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007.